

RENEWABLE ENERGY TALKING POINTS

Background Information on Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ):

Good Afternoon, my name is Guy Williams and I am the President/CEO of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice. I would like to thank Governor Snyder and the Michigan Public Service Commission for hosting this very important discussion about the dire need for clean energy policy. I would also like to thank the League of Conservation Voters for inviting us to participate in this dialogue.

Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (“DWEJ”) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the environmental and economic health of our community. We envision Detroit’s resurgence as a vibrant urban center where all thrive in social, economic, and environmental health. To accomplish this, each day DWEJ strives to build the meaningful connections— between jobs and a healthy environment, community development and environmental justice, and community-driven policy and economic development – that will transform our communities.

In 2012, Prop. 3 garnered grassroots support from across the state to reduce our reliance on coal by pushing for a more aggressive renewable energy target -- 25 by 25. Although the proposal failed, in Detroit, it passed by approximately 62% (61.9%). Detroiters understand the importance of having a strong clean energy standard, because they experience the dangers of dirty energy production every day.

A strong clean energy policy should espouse several tenants of the Principles of Environmental Justice, namely:

- 1) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all people, free from any form of discrimination or bias.**
- 2) Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including: needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.**
- 3) Environmental Justice affirms the need for Urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to full range of resources.**

We support a strong clean energy policy because:

- It reduces our reliance on coal, which has been reported to cause and exacerbate several severe health conditions, particularly common in urban and low income communities

- It will significantly reduce our carbon foot print which is the leading cause of global warming, disproportionately impacting low-income and minority populations because of the heavy concentration of industry in these communities
- Michigan is home to nearly 200 solar and wind power supply chain businesses (121 solar power supply chain businesses and 120 wind power supply chain businesses) creating over 10,000 jobs
- Michigan is a “Big” part supplier. Many suppliers will have the opportunity to develop the parts for renewable energy, thus further strengthening our manufacturing base
- It will increase employment opportunities, particularly among working-class, low-income/minority communities
- 66 percent of Michigan’s power is generated by burning coal imported from out of state, strengthening the economy of other states instead of Michigan’s.
- As of December 2012, the unemployment rate in Detroit is 18.2 percent, which significantly exceeds the national rate, which is 7.9 percent, during the same period
- This alarming statistic can be reduced by strengthening the green jobs market; creating better paying jobs through wind and solar manufacturing and installation, and other renewable energy sources
- According to the State of Michigan Green Jobs Report (2009), the Michigan’s green job sector is expected to grow by 6.4 percent by 2016, producing approximately 12,000 job openings each year and this number will likely increase with a stronger renewable energy standard

We strongly endorse the Coal to Clean Report developed by the Michigan NAACP

Health Impact: A few experts from the Coal to Clean Report

- In Michigan more than 200,000 people live within three miles of a coal-fired power plant owned by either Detroit Edison or Consumer’s Energy. Among those living within 3 miles of a coal power plant, 31 percent are people of color—Coal plants tend to be disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color and are responsible for a significant proportion of toxic emissions that produce negative health Outcomes
- People of color account for 18% of those affected by asthma, but account for 75% of emergency room visits for asthma
- The NAACP partnered with environmental researchers to conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), and concluded that as a result of reduced emissions from coal combustion in 2025, there would be 50,000 fewer asthma exacerbations in Michigan and 320,000 in the U.S.

Most Dangers Pollutants emitted from Coal-Fired Power Plants:

- Mercury- particularly toxic to the development of the nervous system- can cause developmental abnormalities in children, reduced IQ and mental retardation
- Sulfur Dioxide – causes severe asthma and other respiratory illnesses
- Nitrogen Oxide- causes respiratory diseases, severe asthma

ASKS:

- Pass strong clean energy legislation that protects health while stimulating economic growth by providing economic opportunities for Michigan residents– This is a Quality of Life issue, particularly in urban areas. The governor has highlighted the critical need for strong cities to drive Michigan’s economic growth. If these cities have a poor quality of life due to the pollution of dirty power plants, then they will not be desirable places to live and more people will leave.
- Review and adopt the Michigan Climate Change Action Plan, which outlines bold and innovative steps for reducing green house gas emissions, while creating a sustainable and prosperous Michigan
- We are requesting that the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs develop an updated (2011) Green Jobs Report, to reveal the projected green job growth in the state
- Consider that incineration of waste, or “waste to energy,” is not a form of renewable energy. Policy makers must consider only true forms of renewable energy when making Michigan’s energy decisions. Renewable energy, as defined by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, is an energy source that is regenerative or virtually inexhaustible. Waste incineration is not a source of renewable energy. Municipal waste is non-renewable, consisting of discarded materials such as paper, plastic and glass that are derived from finite natural resources such as forests that are being depleted at unsustainable rates. Burning these materials in order to generate electricity creates a demand for “waste” and **discourages** much needed efforts to conserve resources, reduce packaging and waste, reduce green house gas emissions and encourage recycling and composting. More than 90% of materials currently disposed of in incinerators and landfills can be reused, recycled and composted¹.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Energy is an environmental injustice, because the impacts of where it is produced are always on poor, minority communities. Then the poorest can't afford to have heat, electricity, and water-- even though they pay the most for it. Pursuing more diversified, greener energy options is part of the path to equity. We need to always keep in mind the impacts of our choices and investments. One good test is to ask ourselves if we each would live next to the refinery or incinerator that produces the energy we all rely on? And if not, what would need to change? This is an important test for our region if we are going to work together to have better energy options for all. (*Simone Sagovac, Resident from SW Detroit*)

ⁱ Platt, Brenda et al, [Stop Trashing the Climate](#), ILSR, Eco-Cycle & GAIA, 2008